I claim:

1   1. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution,

2   comprising

3   taking the patient's meal order; and

4   tracking the patient's accumulations of dietary constituents based upon patient

5   meal orders.

1   2. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution

2   according to claim 1, further comprising

3   specifying a diet for the patient.

1   3. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution

2   according to claim 2, wherein said step of specifying a diet for the patient further

3   comprises selecting one or more diet types for the patient from a list of diet types.

1   4. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution

2   according to claim 2, wherein said step of taking the patient's meal order comprises

3   selecting items presented from a menu, the presentation of which is determined by the

4   diet specified for the patient.

1   5. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution

2   according to claim 1, further comprising specifying limits of designated dietary

3   constituents for the patient.

1   6. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution

2   according to claim 5, wherein said step of taking the patient's meal order further

3   comprises monitoring incremental contributions of meal order selections to the patient's

4   accumulation of dietary constituents and providing a warning if a meal order selection

5   causes an accumulation to exceed a specified limit for a designated dietary constituent.

1   7. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution,

2   comprising

3   taking the patient's meal order;

4   processing the patient's meal order; and

5   tracking the status of the patient's meal order.

1   8. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution

2   according to claim 7, wherein said step of processing the patient's meal order comprises

3   filling the order by preparing a tray for the patient.

1   9. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution

2   according to claim 8, wherein said tray is given a unique identifier and said step of

3   tracking the status of the patient's meal order comprises tracking the tray by the unique

4   identifier.

1   10. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution

2   according to claim 7, wherein said step of tracking the patient's meal order comprises

3   entry in a database of the status of the patient's meal order.

1   11. An automated method of taking and fulfilling patient meal orders at an institution

2   according to claim 10, wherein the status entered in the database indicates a meal order

3   status selected from the group consisting of meal order taken but not yet fulfilled, meal

4   order fulfilled but not yet delivered, meal order delivered, and meal order cleared.

1   12. An automated system for monitoring the dietary intake status of a patient at an

2   institution, comprising

3   a database of patient information, including patient location and patient dietary

4   status;

5   a display showing patient dietary status for a plurality of patients by patient

6   location; and

7   a user interface to select a patient of interest from the plurality of patients

8   displayed.

1   13. An automated system according to claim 12, wherein said database further includes

2   information on the patient's diet.

1   14. An automated system according to claim 13, wherein said information on the patient's

2   diet comprises a diet type selected for the patient.

1   15. An automated system according to claim 14, further comprising a user interface to

2   select a selected patient's diet type from a list of diet types.

1   16. An automated system according to claim 13, wherein:

2   said information on the patient's diet comprises designated patient intake amounts

3   for selected dietary constituents, said intake amounts comprising at least one of restricted

4   amounts and recommended amounts for each such dietary constituent; and

5   said system further comprises a user interface to select dietary constituents and

6   designate constituent intake amounts thereof for a selected patient.

1   17. An automated system according to claim 12, further comprising a means for tracking

2   dietary constituents of a patient's meals at the institution.

1   18. An automated system according to claim 12, further comprising a means for ordering

2   a patient's meals at the institution.

1   19. An automated system according to claim 12, further comprising an interface to

2   specify meals and to place an order for a meal for a patient at the institution.

1   20. An automated system according to claim 19,

2   further comprising a database of meal menu items, at least some dietary

3   constituents of at least some menu items, and the amounts of such dietary constituents in

4   such menu items,

5   wherein the interface to specify meals for a patient comprises selection of meal

6   menu items from the meal menu item database.

1   21. An automated system according to claim 20, wherein

2   said database of patient information further comprises information on the

3   accumulation of dietary constituents by the patient; and

4   said dietary accumulation information is updated with menu item dietary

5   constituent amount information from the meal menu item database as meal menu items

6   are selected.

1   22. An automated system according to claim 21, wherein

2   said interface to specify meals further comprises a display of said dietary

3   constituent accumulation information.

1   23. An automated system according to claim 21, wherein

2   said interface to specify meals further presents an alarm when a selected meal

3   menu item causes the patient dietary accumulation for a constituent to exceed a

4   predetermined value for such constituent.

1   24. An automated system according to claim 23, wherein

2   said patient database further comprises designated patient intake restrictions for

3   selected dietary constituents; and

4   the predetermined value causing the alarm in the interface to specify meals is

5   based upon the designated patient intake restriction for a selected dietary component.

1   25. An automated system according to claim 23, wherein

2   said patient information database further specifies, for at least some patients, at

3   least one selected diet type appropriate for the patient; and

4   the predetermined value causing the alarm in the interface to specify meals is

5   based upon the at least one selected diet type appropriate for the patient.

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2   26. An automated system according to claim 21, wherein said interface to specify meals

3   allows a user to change a selected meal item based upon the patient's dietary

4   accumulation information before placing the patient's meal order.

1   27. An automated system for managing the meal order and dietary intake status of a

2   patient at an institution, comprising

3   a database of patient information, including at least one diet type designated for a

4   patient;

5   a database of meal menu items, comprising, for at least some of such menu items,

6   at least one diet type appropriate for such menu item;

7   a user interface to specify meals for a patient at the institution comprising

8   selection of presented meal menu items from the meal menu item database;

9   wherein the presentation of a meal menu item in the interface is determined by the

10   at least one diet type designated for the patient and the diet types for which the menu item

11   is appropriate.

1   28. An automated system for monitoring the meal order status of a patient at an

2   institution, comprising

3   a database of patient information, including patient location and meal order status;

4   a display showing patient meal order status for a plurality of patients by patient

5 location and

6   a user interface to select a patient of interest from the plurality of patients

7 displayed.

1 29. An automated system according to claim 28, wherein the meal order status comprises

2 the status of the patient's meal tray for those patients for whom meal trays have been

3 prepared.

1 30. An automated system according to claim 29, wherein the tray status comprises the

2 location of the tray at the institution.

1 31. An automated system according to claim 28, further comprising an interface to enter

2 the meal order status of a selected patient.

1 32. An automated system according to claim 28, further comprising an interface for

2 entering and changing the location of a designated patient.